



Augustine on Heart and Life

Essays in Memory of William Harmless, S.J.

Edited by John J. O'Keefe and Michael Cameron

2. “Stretch Yourself on the Rack of Your Heart” (S. 13.7)

Reality, Spirituality, and Emotions in Augustine’s Imagery

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Abstract

When transmitted in writing sermons lose most of the actual contemporary context of their oral delivery. However, the rhetorical images used by the preacher may provide a key to access state of mind and emotions of both orator and audience. This “unlocking of minds and hearts” requires (1) the oral re-enacting of the text, in order to verify the actual form and delivery of the spoken word, and (2) the (archaeological) reconstruction of the real world those images refer to, in order to avoid misunderstandings by introducing modern (mis)conceptions. This newly suggested method is exemplified by analyzing Augustine’s admonition “Stretch yourself on the rack of your heart” (S. 13.7). First the material reality of the rack in antiquity is closely studied in order to ascertain the precise impression its notion made on the minds of the audience. On this basis the unrecorded emotional and psychological effects of the image are investigated. Eventually, the similar use of the same

image by Gregory of Nyssa shows the wide-spread diffusion of this kind of rhetoric that evokes emotions through images and the value of introducing their analysis as a key to the oral and unrecorded context of ancient sermons in general.

Keywords: Images, imagination, realia, torture, oral delivery of sermons, emotions, Gregory of Nyssa

Introduction

When the *Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa* convened in 1998 in Paderborn, Germany, Fr. William Harmless, S.J., composed two poems for it, one *in persona* of Gregory of Nyssa on “The Apokatastasis,” the other *in persona* of Gregory of Nazianzus on “Perichoresis.” In the introduction he stated: “Before writing them, I went through the works of each Gregory and made long lists of images that I found scattered about their writings. These images became my palette, so to speak. I tried to paint, as much as possible, with Cappadocian colors” (xvii).

Like so many things that Fr. Harmless wrote, the perception of images as “colors for verbal painting” is both inspired and inspiring because it points the way to new perspectives for understanding the use and function of images in ancient oratory, especially in Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo. Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine are remarkably kindred spirits in so many respects that for more than two centuries some kind of dependency has been suggested, though no direct link could ever be ascertained (cf. e.g., Glauber; Ladner; Callahan; Sweeney; von Stritzky; Welcherling; Drobner 2013). This is also the case with regard to the exceptionally rich use of images in their sermons (cf. Poque; Drobner 1996), which prompts one to apply the idea of “painting with verbal colors” to Augustine’s oratory as well.

Unlocking Minds and Hearts

The charm of looking at rhetorical images as “verbal painting” lies in the fact that images by their very nature – be they created by colors or words – communicate more than the components they consist of. They do not only address the considered reflections of the conscious intellect, they also appeal – possibly even more so – to the spontaneous reactions of the subconscious, the imagination, and the emotions. Images create corresponding images in the mind of both the beholder and the listener. Thus, an essential part of the communication between artist or orator and an audience is effected beyond the material object, the spoken word. Thus, it seems promising to use rhetorical images as a key to access the unspoken parts of the oral context and delivery of Augustine’s sermons as well as the spontaneous emotional reactions of his audience, or, in other words, to unlock the minds and hearts of both preacher and audience.

Re-enacting the Spoken Word

As Augustine's sermons were taken down by stenographers (*notarii*) while being actually preached,¹ one might assume that – apart from errors introduced by stenographers and copyists or other misadventures in the history of transmission – the ancient audience and the modern reader are presented with the same text. However, this is not completely true; though the words may be the same, their impact is far from identical.

The spoken word changes substantially when it is being taken down and perused because it usually loses all or at least most of the vivid context of its oral delivery and reception, or, staying with the metaphor of verbal painting, the preacher's oral brushwork and the audience's mental canvas. On the part of preacher, his posture, body language, facial expression and gestures, his accent, intonation, articulation, pronunciation and emphases, strength and pitch of voice, clarity or lack of selfsame, his speed of talking, pauses etc. are missing. On the part of the audience, the personal presuppositions like extraction, upbringing, education, curriculum vitae, individual knowledge and experience, capacity of imagination, also the momentary situation and circumstances the recipient was in while listening to Augustine, like mood, state of receptiveness and attentiveness, being tired, worried, eager, distressed etc., all remain unknown. Nevertheless, all and sundry of them make a big difference for the delivery and the reception of a sermon.

It is true that sometimes the outer and wider circumstances like time, place, weather, events, politics, preoccupations, disasters, entertainments etc. are mentioned by Augustine or denoted by the stenographers and copyists. Once in a while the texts record conditions like the weak voice of the preacher, his and his audience's exhaustion (for instance, because of heat or length of ceremonies), special occurrences, including disturbances during the sermon, unrest and talking among the hearers, even dialogues between preacher and the audience (see, e.g., van der Meer: 445-49; Hamman: 228-39; Pellegrino: 88-96). Nevertheless, all of this gives only the faintest idea of the overall and complex circumstances of the sermons and the constant interaction between preacher and audience. Most of the time there is no indication whatsoever of anything beyond the words pronounced, and, at any rate, there remains a huge gap between reading about these things and the experience of the actual personal and emotional impact they had in the interaction of preacher and audience.

Only comparatively recently an increased awareness of this problem has begun to emerge. Heinrich Marti (2003: 126-30; 2005: 105-25) and Stanley P. Rosenberg (2010: 169-74; 2012: 418-20) have made it quite clear that the understanding of an oratorical text, a sermon without a thorough knowledge – even re-enacting – of its factual backgrounds and circumstances remains fragmentary and, even, often misleading. "We should learn to forget that we, here and now, are only readers" (Marti 2003: 127) because even the correct

¹ See *En. Ps.* 51.1: "Some of our brethren have decided not only to take in what we say with their ears and hearts, but also to commit to writing" (Boulding: 13); Possidius, *Vita Augustini* 7: "Publicly and privately, at home and at church, Augustine confidently taught and preached the word of salvation. . . . At these gatherings, whoever wished and was able to do so brought stenographers to take down what was said" (Muller and Deferrari: 80-81; see Deferrari: 119-23; Hagendahl: 33-35; Teitler; Pellegrino: 16-18; Hammerstaedt: 1273-75; Rebillard: 790-91; Teitler: 533-37; Hübner: 216-18).

reconstruction of the texts themselves may depend on it, as Séverine Issaeva (26-27) has shown drawing on an example from *S. Dolbeau* 6.1. The text in question runs as follows:

Non nobis videatur incredibile, fratres, deos fieri homines, id est <ut> qui homines erant dii fiant.

We mustn't find it incredible, brothers and sisters, that human beings become gods, that is, that those who were human beings become gods (Hill 1997: 37).

It ought not seem incredible to us, brethren, for men to become gods, that is, that those who were men become gods (Casiday: 28).

When François Dolbeau edited the text from the only manuscript in the Municipal Library in Mainz, Germany, he added <ut> which, indeed, *reading* the text seems to be missing.

Edmund Hill annotated his translation by saying:

This “clarification,” while merely tautological in the English, is not so in the Latin. There, “that human beings become gods,” being an accusative and infinitive clause, could also have been heard as “that gods become human beings” – and he does not yet want to say that (1997: 46 n. 4).

But why, then, does Augustine let this ambiguity arise, asks Issaeva. For a comprehensive analysis of Augustine’s use of the double accusative in the Dolbeau Sermons shows that he quite consistently uses the first accusative before the infinitive as subject, the second as the object. Therefore, did the master orator Augustine here commit an involuntary slip of tongue, which he immediately corrected? Issaeva does not think so. Rather, she says, he deliberately played on the bewilderment of the audience which may only be properly understood when one pronounces the sentence orally as was the case with Augustine:

Non nobis videatur incredibile, fratres, deos [with special emphasis on it?] fieri homines . . . [pregnant pause for giving the audience time to draw their own conclusions: of course, a god – if it really is a god – can do whatever he wants to, even become a human being as the Son of God, the Logos in fact did; that is no miracle] . . . id est [ut is not necessary] qui homines erant dii fiant [that is incredible].

In fact, immediately following this sentence, Augustine starts to talk about the incarnation of the Son of God:

More incredible still is what has already been bestowed on us, that one who was God should become a human being. . . . The Son of God became a son of man, in order to make sons of men into sons of God.

So, what Augustine really does – and what can only be grasped if one treats the sermon as what it is, namely an oral text – is: he deliberately presents his audience with a bewildering dilemma; firstly, in order to gain their attention (*attentum facere*, as is proper for the opening of a speech), but at the same time to start them thinking for themselves and thus prepare them mentally to follow his subsequent arguments.

Reconstructing Reality

Evidently, the oral re-enacting of the spoken word can be most useful for the reconstruction of its delivery, even for the reconstitution of the text itself. Nevertheless, it still leaves most of the aforementioned circumstances largely undisclosed, especially the inner proceedings in the minds and hearts of both preacher and audience. This is where images come into their own.

As was said before, the images the preacher paints with his words create corresponding images in the mind of the audience, leaving subconscious impressions, evoking personal memories, and arousing emotions. In order to be able to do so, they must presuppose a common cultural ground between preacher and audience, that is, they must be based on the joint knowledge and experience of their contemporary environment. To suppose otherwise would render their application meaningless and without effect as the following example shows.

“Arise, O my glory! Arise, psaltery and lyre!” Commenting on this line from Psalm 56:9 Augustine explains (*En. Ps. 56.16*):

The psaltery, as you know, is an instrument which is held in the hands of the player. It has strings stretched across it. But the wooden, concave sounding-chamber which lends resonance to the strings, the overhanging² vaulted piece which resounds to the touch because it is filled with air, is in a psaltery located in the upper part.

A lyre, on the contrary, has its concave, wooden sounding-chamber at the bottom. This means that in a psaltery the strings derive their resonance from above, whereas in the lyre they derive it from the lower part. This is the difference between a psaltery and a lyre (Boulding: 117; Cameron: 173; cf. also *En. Ps. 32[2].5; 42.5; 70[2].11; 80.5*).

James McKinnon concluded from this description: “Both Pseudo-Athanasius and Augustine, ignoring the fact that the psalms referred to real musical instruments, simply used the instruments as symbols for doctrinal or ethical truths” (4).

Helmut Giesel went even a step further and transferred McKinnon’s verdict to all of early Christian literature:

None of the ecclesiastical authors had any exact idea of the musical instruments they were writing about, not least because of the fact that their symbolical explanations almost without exception referred to musical instruments of the old Israel as mentioned in the Psalms (p. vii). . . . It is unlikely that many Fathers of the Church had any precise idea of what they called psaltery. They knew that it was a stringed instrument, but they were

² Boulding leaves this word out, possibly in order to adapt her translation to the presumed better understanding of the modern reader as she also does with regard to the organ below, but in fact detracting from the full symbolism of Augustine’s image.

not able to identify it with the Hebrew *nevel*, because they were neither familiar with the Hebrew language nor with biblical archaeology (138).

Giesel supports his conclusion by the observation that the same description of *psalterium* and *cithara* which Augustine gives, can also be found in Eusebius of Caesarea, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Hilary, Jerome, Rufinus, and thus seems to constitute just a literary *topos* (see 58-59, 64, 69-70, 75-76, 137-38, 151-52).

If, however, one reads Augustine's text not with a view to the biblical historical instruments but the musical instruments of his own times, it becomes quite clear that both authors miss the essential point. Augustine and most other Fathers of the Church certainly knew neither Hebrew nor had they any idea of what an Old Testament *nevel* (or, *nēbel*) looked like, and neither had their audience – and, for that matter, neither do we, as no specimen or picture of it from the times of the compositions of the Psalms has been preserved (see Jones: 937; Braun: 178f.).

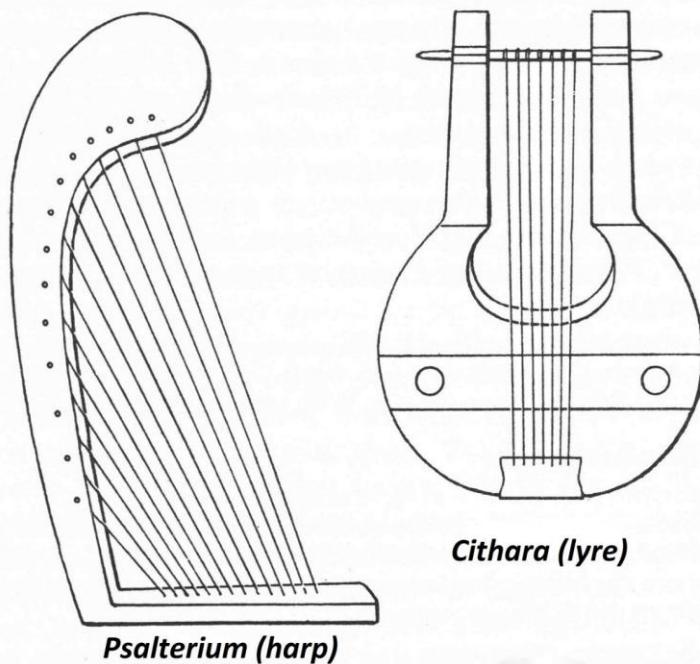


Figure 1. Ancient *psalterium* and *cithara* (Wille: 2025).

However, this does not mean that neither the preacher nor the audience had any idea about the instruments they were talking about, nor that they did not care because those were only “symbols for doctrinal or moral truths.” Augustine and all other Christian authors quoted could not and did not want to refer to historical instruments of ancient Israel; they took the words as they were used in their own times and described very precisely the musical instruments as also their audience knew them (Figure 1). Otherwise, why use an image nobody could picture? Consequently, given the intention of the use of images to make a theological or spiritual point clearer in the minds of the audience, one needs to assume that they refer to actual realities in the times of the sermon.

What, then, do these instruments (*organa*) symbolize for us? The Lord Jesus Christ, our God, arouses both his psaltery and lyre, and says, “I will arise at dawn” (Ps. 56:9). You do not need to be told that this is a reference to our Lord’s resurrection. . . .

What is the lyre? The Lord used his flesh for two kinds of operations: miracles and sufferings. The miracles came from above, the sufferings from below. The miracles he performed were divine, but he worked them through his body, he wrought them through his flesh. So when the flesh performs divine works, it is a psaltery; but when the flesh suffers human pain it is a lyre (Boulding: 117-18; Cameron: 173).



Figure 2. Pneumatic organ, Aquincum, Hungary (a. 228), reconstruction in the Aquincum Museum, Budapest, Hungary.



Figure 3. Pneumatic organ, Obelisk erected by Emperor Theodosius (379/88-395) in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, pedestal, east face, right lower corner.

Both McKinnon and Giesel only pay attention to the doctrinal symbolism Augustine deduces from the images of psaltery and lyre, but he also aims at arousing emotions.

All musical instruments are called *organa*. [Not only that one is called an organ which is large and is filled with air by a pair of bellows (Figures 2-3,³ but] whatever is suitable to accompany a song and has a body a singer can

³ See *En. Ps.* 150.7. Augustine obviously does not refer to a *hydraulis*, a water organ which had been widely used from the third century BCE, but to a pneumatic organ. The earliest example of those was excavated in Aquincum in 1933 and dates from the year 228 CE. A pneumatic organ is also depicted on the east side of the pedestal of the obelisk erected by Emperor Theodosius (379/88-395) in the Hippodrome of Constantinople and other artifacts in East and West from the 3rd and 4th centuries CE (see Lajos; Kaba).

use, is called *organum*. . . . The psaltery, as you know, is an instrument which is held in the hands of the player (Boulding: 117; Cameron: 172).

Maria Boulding leaves out the half-sentence in square brackets adding the note: “Since this is alien to our usage, a phrase has been omitted.” However, by omitting the detailed description of a pneumatic pipe-organ she misses Augustine’s intended and essential emotional point for comparing it to the hand-held psaltery and lyre as *S.* 33.1 on Psalm 143:9 elucidates:

As it is written, “O God, I will sing you a new song, on a harp of ten strings (*in psalterio decem chordarum*) I will play to you” (Ps. 143:9), we take the harp of ten strings to be the ten commandments of the law. Now to sing and play is usually the occupation of lovers. The old man, you see, is in fear, the new is in love (Hill 1990b: 154).

Apparently, as it does even for us, the reference to the psaltery conjured up the image of a serenade sung and played for one’s beloved. In contrast to the big bulk of an organ which always remains opposite its player, the psaltery has a personal, intimate air about it; it is taken in one’s arms, it can be hugged and clung to – like the beloved. Therefore, while the doctrinal and spiritual goals of mentioning the psaltery are different in both cases (love towards the commandments, loving the risen Christ), the emotional aim is the same: to awaken the emotion of intimacy and love in the hearts of the audience.

Thus, images used in sermons do not function as mere “theological and spiritual symbols” without any relation to the real contemporary world but use the common knowledge and experience of reality in order to teach Christian faith and behavior using emotions as an instrument to convince the audience and nudge them into action. Consequently, the modern reader, who was neither present at the oral delivery of the sermon nor shares the common cultural ground of the ancient preacher and audience, needs to perform a thorough historical and archaeological investigation of the ancient *realia* in order to understand both the theological meaning and the emotional impact of the images used. This holds true for each and every one of Augustine’s images, and his admonition “stretch yourself on the rack of your heart” leads directly into the heart of the matter.

The “Rack of the Heart”

If you have taken your place on the elevated seat of judgment in your mind, if you have stretched yourself on the rack (*eculeus* – little horse) of your heart before your very eyes, if you have applied to yourself the harsh tortures of fear – then you have heard the case well (if that is how you have heard it), and without doubt you have punished sin with repentance (*S.* 13.7; Hill 1990a: 312).

While reading, or listening to, these words, in the mind of all and sundry a certain spontaneous image is formed, according to each person’s individual presuppositions. However, does this spontaneous idea concur with Augustine’s text, intentions and effects correctly and fully? The answer to this question requires, as was explained, an analysis that asks three further questions: (1) What reality is Augustine referring to? (2) What theological and spiritual message does he intend to convey? (3) What kind of emotions does he want to rouse in order to move his audience to translate his teaching into action?

The Material Rack

Even in the twenty-first century a torture device called “Spanish horse/donkey” is still in use, though almost all nations in the world (160 of them) signed and ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture from December 10, 1984. It is a sharply angled wooden device of triangular shape pointing upward; it is sometimes also studded with nails and mounted on horse-leg like support poles. The usually naked victim is then made to sit on the main board as if riding a horse, and, in addition, weights may be attached to the victim’s feet in order to increase the agony and prevent the person from falling off (Figure 4). However, in this as in many cases the immediate modern conception would miss historical reality. On principle, one needs to inquire into contemporary ancient sources, preferably Augustine’s works themselves.



Figure 4. Spanish horse/donkey.

Unfortunately, “the torture on the *eculeus* is as often mentioned in Roman sources as the torture on the wheel in Greek texts. However, details about its construction and way of operation are very rare” (Vergote: 121).

Lucius Annaeus Seneca the Younger writes in his *Letters* 66.18 and 67.3 that the delinquent was lying on the rack, and that it stretched the body.

The *Acts of Theodoret of Antioch*, a martyr under Emperor Julian in 362, adds: “He ordered a rack (*eculeum*) to be brought and Theodoret to be suspended on it. The torturers quickly executed this order, and they stretched the limbs of the blessed martyr both by wheel (*rota*) and ropes (*funibus*)” (5; Franchi de’ Cavalieri 94.26-28).

Antonio Gallonio (Figure 5) reconstructed a device taller than a man for one victim lying on the beam, another one hanging from it, both bound by ropes which ran over wheels on either side to lower cross bars between the legs of the rack which could be turned by handles.⁴

S S. M A R T Y R V M.

95



- A** Martyr in equuleo.
- B** Martyr pendens ab equuleo:
- C** Lampades accense.
- D** Scorpiones. His torquendi instrumentis, qui in equuleum agebantur, excruciarci aliquando solebant. De scorpionibus fusissime cap. 4.
- E** de lampadibus cap. 6.

Figure 5. Reconstruction of an ancient *eculeus* (Gallonio: 95 = Stork: 237).

⁴ Vergote: 121 reprints the sketch from Grupen: Tafel A, Abb. 8, who in turn depends – directly or indirectly – on Gallonio (see Stork: 237).

On the same literary basis Jozef Vergote arrives at a different conclusion: “Three details need to be corrected:

1. The drawing of the suspended victim is to be deleted.
2. Possibly the bars for moving the hoists were occasionally replaced by wheels.
3. The beam the victim was lying on must have been lower to the ground, about as high as the height of human shoulders” (121).

The last idea Vergote concludes from a fact which also Augustine reports in *S. 29A.3 (S. Denis 9)*:

For very often there is a use of scourges and whips (*flagellis et verberibus*) of all kinds, of hooks and fire (*ungulis et ignibus*), to extract a verbal confession. And sometimes the limbs give way to the tortures and the body’s unity is dissolved, before the mind gives way to pain and the secret of the crime is divulged. The tortures press on and add all kinds of tortures. In vain is the body mangled and entrails laid bare (*laniando aperiuntur viscera*) while the conscience remains closed denying the charge (Hill 1990b: 121).

Other sources report as well that on the rack the victim’s body was not just painfully stretched, but also beaten, burned, and mangled by iron hooks to the point that the abdomen was ripped open (see Hitzig; Hug; Ehrhardt; Vergote; Schiemann).

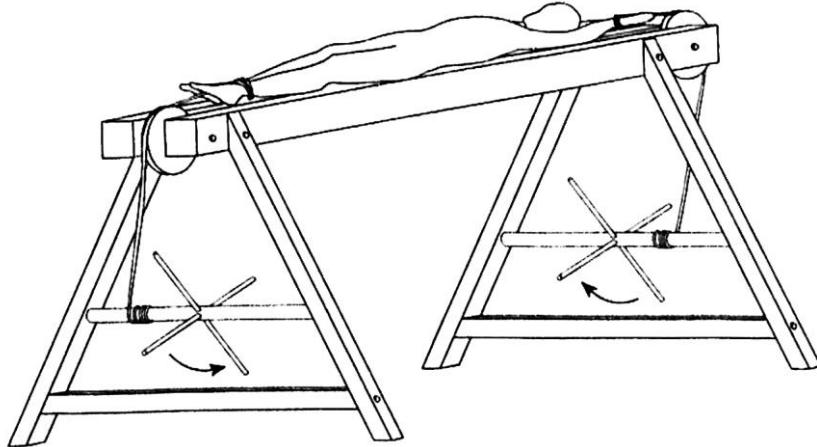


Figure 6. Reconstruction of an ancient *ecclensis* (Haase: 586).

Given all these details, the rack can certainly not have been higher than the torturers head as Gallonio depicts it, but neither is it probable that it was shoulder-high as Vergote thinks. For the accompanying tortures of beating, burning, and lacerating, the rack must have been about on the level of human hips.

This is the way Mareille Haase reconstructed it (Figure 6). Nevertheless, even there questions remain. For instance, the *Acts of Theodore* mentions only “one wheel” and (several) “ropes,” not “wheels” on either side. One could, therefore, easily imagine that the delinquent was bound by ropes hand and foot, but one wheel would have been quite sufficient for

stretching the body. The wheel could have had the shape of a cylinder at one end of the board and rotated by an axle going through its center, as was the case with racks in the Middle Ages (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Medieval rack (© David Hughes).

Or, there might not have been any bar/axle and handle at all. One could also imagine that the rope was pulled manually or a weight was appended to it. Or, as a rack in the Tower of London has it, wheel(s) and ropes may have been arranged quite differently, and the stretching was effected by a lever (see Figure 8).

Possibly, therefore, or rather most probably, our modern reconstructions of an ancient rack – ostensibly derived from the interpretation of the literary sources – may already be highly influenced by images of racks we know from the medieval and modern periods without being aware of it. However, as was mentioned before, this unconscious introduction of contemporary concepts represents the gravest danger in understanding historical imagery.

Of course, one may justifiably ask: Do the material details really matter as long as the fundamental spiritual meaning of the image is correctly understood, which is in the case of the rack, that it cause pain in order to elicit the truth? Yes, it does, because there is a huge difference in meaning and impact between a general, more or less theoretical, idea and the exact knowledge of what the tortures consisted of when it comes to assessing the emotional impact they had on the imagination. The general knowledge of the fact that the rack was an instrument of torture causing pain in order to elicit a confession appeals only to the intellect. On the other hand, knowing, or even have experienced, all the details of the unbearable pain which induces even innocent people to confess to a crime they have not committed, just in order to get it over with, makes one shudder at the thought of them, being frightened out of

one's wits at the mere thought of suffering those tortures. But this is the emotional effect the preacher wants to achieve in his audience, and only the empathy of the modern reader – as far as this is at all possible – can do full justice to the comprehension of Augustine's words.



Figure 8. Rack in the Tower of London.

Spiritual Aim and Emotional Effects

A text from *De civitate Dei* 19.6 confirms this conclusion and complements the understanding of Augustine's spiritual and emotional intentions when he calls on his audience, "stretch yourself on the rack of your heart."

For those who judge obviously cannot see into the consciences of those whom they judge. As a result, they are often compelled to seek the truth by torturing innocent witnesses in a case that has nothing to do with them.

And what about torture applied to a person in his own case? The question here is whether or not he is guilty. But he is tortured even if he is innocent; and so, for a crime that is uncertain, he suffers an all too certain punishment – not because he is found to have committed the crime but because it is not known that he did not commit it. For this reason the ignorance of the judge is most often a calamity for the innocent.

And what is still more intolerable . . . is the fact, when the judge tortures the accused in order to keep from unknowingly putting an innocent person to

death, it may happen that, as a result of his wretched ignorance, he puts to death, both tortured and innocent, the very person whom he had tortured in order to keep him from putting an innocent person to death.

For if . . . the accused chooses to flee from this life rather than endure those torments any longer, he admits that he committed a crime he did not commit. And, when he has been condemned and put to death, the judge still does not know whether it was a guilty or an innocent man he put to death (Babcock: 360).

Now, what kind of emotions does the image of the rack and the connected tortures evoke? Above all, fear, and that includes each and everyone in the church because all may be affected, be they judges, defendants or witnesses, innocent or guilty. While originally only slaves were subjected to torture, at the end of fourth century nobody was exempt, not even senators and members of the nobility (see Helbing: 2: 37-40; Ehrhardt: 1782-85; Thür: 105-8; Peters: 29-33). However, in the heart fear is the means of torture, and repentance constitutes the punishment. What kind of fear is that which torments persons lying on the rack of their heart? Apparently, the fear of the God the eternal judge “who discerns heart and mind (kidneys)” (Psalm 7:10), causing the pain of unbiased self-knowledge, of recognizing and confessing one’s own sins.

Consequently, and that is the spiritual aim of the image employed, Augustine calls on the members of his flock to examine their hearts and pass sentence on themselves, that is, to repent in order to escape God’s final judgement as he stresses various times:

This is the first step in attaching our hearts to the law of God, that what he punishes you should punish too . . . Sin, you see, simply cannot go unpunished. You do not want him to punish; see that you punish yourself . . . You are going to come before the judge; be your own judge (*S. Dolbeau* 8.3; Hill 1997: 65).

This is what God says to you: “Your sin must be punished, either by you or by me.” So sin is punished either by man repenting or by God judging . . . Give your heart a shaking by repentance, and this will be a sacrifice to God (*S. 19.2*; Hill 1990a: 379).

Let your sin have you as its judge, not as its defending counsel. Take your seat upon the bench of your mind against yourself, and put yourself in the dock before yourself (*S. 20.2*; Hill 1990b: 16).

. . . by repenting he after a fashion punishes in himself what displeases him. (*S. 29.6*; Hill 1990b: 118).

Within his audience, Augustine addresses in particular the magistrates who are present in the church (cf. Dodaro: 338-39) and who officiate as judges:

Therefore, in order not to be unjust in your authority, all you who wish to exercise authority over others, be instructed how not to judge crookedly and so lose your own soul even before you destroy anyone else’s flesh . . . first, for your own sake, sit in judgment on yourself. First judge your own case, so

that out of your conscience's chambers you may without anxiety proceed against another person. Go back into yourself (*in te ipsum redi*), pay attention to yourself, examine yourself, listen to yourself. I want you to prove yourself an honest judge in the case where you require no witness . . . Before you go to court you must do some judging inside yourself . . . if you have stretched yourself on the rack of your heart (*S.* 13.7; Hill 1990a: 312).

For judges, the “rack of the heart” arouses another kind of fear, namely the concern of judging honestly and justly. The admonition “go back into yourself” (*in te ipsum redi*; cf. *S.* 13.3: *redi ad cor tuum*),⁵ ties Augustine’s advice in with his wider theology of the inner man, based on both biblical (Isaiah 46:8 *redite ad cor*; see Deléani) and Neoplatonic sources (e.g., Porphyry, Άφορμαὶ πρὸς τὰ νοητὰ 37, 33.2-34.3; 40:3-5, 36.11-38.22; see Courcelle: 113-63). For it is in the heart where God dwells in man and where he can be found (see *En. Ps.* 57.1, 3; *Io. eu. tr.* 18.10; de la Peza; Berrouard; Bauer; Grossi; Madec; Bochet; Demura).

The inner court of the heart in the presence of God, the eternal judge, anticipates the final judgment. Consequently, as was said before regarding the general public, everybody had better sit in judgment on his or her own sins before God does so. Judges, however, have to examine their hearts not only in order to repent of their sins, but to learn from God, the simultaneously just and merciful judge, in their heart, how to judge well, namely both justly and mercifully.

Given these difficulties and dangers, would it not be better to avoid the office of judge completely and thus be at ease in one’s heart? No, answers Augustine, because the office of judge is necessary for society, but the wise and pious judge will be aware of the perils his office incurs and will ask for God’s help:

In the midst of these dark shadows of social life, will the wise man serve as a judge or will he shrink from doing so? Clearly he will serve . . . for the wise judge does not do these things from any will to inflict harm but rather from the inescapable necessity of ignorance . . .

Must he also be counted happy? How much more perceptive it would be, how much more worthy of a human being, for him to recognize human misery laid bare by those necessities, to detest that misery’s grip on him, and, if he is devout in his wisdom (*piè sapiū*), to cry out to God, *Deliver me from my necessities!* (Psalm 24:17) (*Civ.* 19.6; Babcock: 360-61).

Thus, the admonition to stretch oneself on the rack of the heart is, for a judge, not only a call to self-knowledge and repentance, but also to understanding his office as a necessary burden which he was not entrusted with for his personal grandeur, financial gain or proud exertion of power, and to encourage him to personal humility and leniency towards the persons he is dealing with in court.

⁵ See *redi in te ipsum* (*Io. eu. tr.* 34.10; *Vera rel.* 39:72); *redi(re) ad cor (tuum)* (*En Ps.* 57.1, 2; 85.8; *Io. eu. tr.* 18.10; *S.* 13.3; 15.7; 311.13); *intra (in) cor tuum* (*En Ps.* 33.2.8; *S.* 341A.3 [*S. Mai* 22]); *intra in te* (*S.* 28A.6 [*S. Dolbeau* 9]); *redi ad conscientiam tuam* (*En Ps.* 85.9; 140.14; *Ep. Io. tr.* 8.9; *S.* 106:4; 181:4; 107A [*S. Lambot* 5]).

The best procedure, Augustine advises the tribune of North Africa Marcellinus in *Letter* 133.2 from 411/12 CE (see Mandouze: 671-88; Divjak: 945-46, 1042; Drecoll: 1160-65), would be to abstain completely from applying torture by rack, iron claws, or fire. The judge should only use a rod as schoolmasters do, and, in general, act like a loving father who punishes his children only for pedagogical correction.

As a consequence, this clemency also forbids the death sentence, because it deprives the delinquent of the principal objective of his confession, namely to repent and to mend his ways:

Fulfill, Christian judge, the task of a devoted father. Be angry at wickedness in such a way that you remember to be humane, and do not turn the desire for revenge upon the atrocities of the sins, but apply a willingness to heal the wounds of the sinners.

Do not abandon your fatherly carefulness that you maintained during the inquiry, when you obtained the confession of such great crimes without stretching them on the rack (*extendente eculeo*), without cleaving their flesh by iron claws (*sulcantibus ungulis*), without scorching them with flames (*urentibus flammis*), but by beating them with rods (*virgarum verberibus*). That is a method of correction that is customarily practiced by teachers of the liberal arts, by parents themselves, and often also by bishops in their courts.

Therefore do not punish in a more fierce way what you have investigated in a gentler manner. . . . Therefore, do not let the power to punish make you harsh, since the need to carry out an interrogation did not shake your clemency. Do not, once the crime has been discovered, summon an executioner, since in its discovery you were unwilling to bring in a torturer. (Daur: 242-43; translation compiled from Cunningham: 470-71; Parsons: 7-8; Atkins: 62; Teske: 203-4).

After admonishing the judge to stretch himself on the rack of the heart first, the continuation of *Sermon* 13.8 matches exactly the arguments of *Letter* 133:

If you hear your neighbor's case in the same way as you hear your own, you will attack the sins, not the sinner. . . . So do not condemn people to death, or while you are attacking the sin you will destroy the man. Do not condemn to death, and there will be someone who can repent. . . . As a man having this kind of love for men in your heart, be a judge of the earth. . . .

Be savage with what you dislike in yourself, not with one who was made in the same way as you. You come from the same workshop, from the hands of the same craftsman; the same clay provided your raw material. Why destroy, by not loving, the one on whom you sit in judgment? . . .

"But penalties must be applied." I do not deny it, I do not forbid it; only let it be done on a spirit of love, a spirit of caring, a spirit of reforming. You do not fail, after all, to educate your own son (Hill 1990a: 312-13; cf. Blázquez Fernández: 1975-77).

With that, Augustine has arrived at the ultimate theological and spiritual reason for judging leniently, that is, the common human nature as creatures, made by the same creator of the same dirt and sharing its frailty as sinners.

After-Effects

While not condemning the use of torture as part of legal proceedings in general, Augustine can only accept it as a necessary evil and criticizes it on principle for its unreliability to reach the goal it is administered for, namely to elicit the truth. For truth, and that is another consequence implied by the “rack of the heart,” cannot be found by outward procedures, but only inside the human being, in the heart where the Truth dwells, God himself.

Augustine’s position anticipated the arguments which eventually led to recognizing torture as a cruelly inhuman and yet unreliable instrument of justice in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. The passage from *De civitate Dei* 19.6 was highly appreciated and may even have been instrumental in developing the modern argumentation:

Absolutely true words! If they were only imprinted in the mind of each and every judge lest so many unhappy mortals suffer death unnecessarily and undeservedly because of a confession made under torture (Thomasius: 26).

The jurist Paul Johann Anselm von Feuerbach added:

More than a thousand years before him a . . . faithful shepherd of the holy Church, an orthodox African bishop, compiled all the arguments . . . against torture *in nuce*, and he spoke far more succinctly and ingeniously about it than it was sometimes done in our philosophical century, when the observations of this Father of the Church – maybe without being aware of it – were only spun out by all kinds of figures of speech . . . It was Saint Augustine who in his book *De civitate Dei* XIX:VI expressly pronounced himself against the most essential flaws of that method for eliciting the truth . . . Thanks be to Augustine that he first . . . spread the seed of goodness and truth! (24-25; cf. Cattaneo: 457-60).

Nevertheless, only in 1740/1754 Prussia abolished torture as the first state worldwide; others only followed suit in the course of the 19th century (see Helbing: 2: 216).

Gregory of Nyssa on Torture by Rack, Claws, and Fire

A comparison with the works of Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine’s kindred spirit, shows that their methods and goals of employing images are identical. In the context of the historical sufferings of the martyrs, Gregory describes the instruments of torture and their emotional impact in detail:

The terrors lay not only in the threats that were uttered, but in addition the cunning preparation of the instruments of torture brought consternation and filled people with fear even before they had experienced them. They thought of swords and fire ($\pi\tilde{\nu}\varrho = ignis$) and beasts and pits and limb-twisting racks ($\sigma\tau\rho\beta\lambda\omega\tau\kappa\alpha \delta\rho\gamma\alpha\omega = eculei$), and iron chairs on the fire, and wooden stakes

on which the stretched-out bodies of the victims were torn in shreds with the application of fearful claws (*ὄνυχοι* = *ungulae*),⁶ and lots of other inventions for torturing bodies in many ways (*Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* 81; Heil: 45.21-46.3; translation from Slusser: 77).

First of all, Gregory, too, makes no attempt to research and explain the historical instruments of torture to his readers because this is not only unnecessary for his rhetorical aim but would be even counter-productive. In order to instill terror, as he is want to do, his audience needs to know and fear these instruments personally, not with an intellectual-historical distance. Therefore Gregory, too, does not content himself to speak of instruments of torture in general, but describes them in precise detail. He wants to communicate emotions, make his readers literally feel with the martyrs, their hearts being filled with terror even at the thought of those instruments and the excruciating pain they cause.

Gregory's spiritual aim in this case is to rouse admiration and affection for the martyrs, who stood fast against overwhelming fear and pain. He wanted to encourage his audience to follow their example and, praying for God's assistance, to stand firm for the faith whatever it takes for the sake of eternal salvation:

having ordered his companion to stand with firm and unwavering confidence towards God and to believe in salvation, holding up his hands in prayer like him, and not to let his faith be driven away by fear ... he made himself an example . . . (*Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* 85; Heil: 47.22-48.5; translation from Slusser: 79).

Conclusion

In conclusion, both Gregory and Augustine use images as an effective tool to reach the principal goal of all good rhetoric, namely to move (*movere*) their audience through their words to action. Intellectual arguments may convince the mind; emotions, however, act as a powerful driving force from within the heart (*psyche*). In other words, returning to our initial metaphor of verbal painting, while an artist who creates a picture with colors may possibly be indifferent whether his painting will be understood and appreciated by the beholders, the orator cannot and must not do likewise. Drawing mental images with words he must be intent not only on being comprehended by his audience, but above all on being followed. To provide the emotional stimulus for doing so is the foremost reason and special effect of rhetorical images.

In order to unlock these only implicitly expressed parts of ancient sermons the modern reader needs to treat them as what they really are: lively mirrors of a real, lively world, given by living human beings to living humans under specific and real circumstances, including all aspects of material and human life in order to motivate people emotionally; not an academic composition of words with the intention of conveying some philosophical, theological or spiritual meaning.

⁶ Cf. above Augustine, *Sermon 29A.3* (= *S. Denis 9*).

Sermons must be imagined or even re-enacted in an environment which comes as close to their original circumstances as possible, because even the mere time that public preaching lasted shaped its reality. It makes a big difference whether one reads *S. Dolbeau* 26, which took some three hours to pronounce (see Dolbeau 1992: 76; 2009: 352; Hill 1997: 229 n. 1; Anoz: 501 n. 1; Brown: 134), in the comfort of a well-heated study, or whether one is prepared to listen to it standing on a cold afternoon, January 1st, in an unheated church.

Re-enacting sermons combined with a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the imagery that Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa employed so richly in their sermons as reflection of their contemporary world can thus serve as a key to the psyche and the emotions of both preacher and audience which otherwise remain hidden – or, in other words, can unlock their minds and hearts.

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Figures

Figure 2

Pneumatical organ found in Aquincum, Hungary (*a.* 228), reconstruction in the Aquincum Museum, Budapest, Hungary. Photo by Jerzy Kociatkiewicz, August 20, 2007. Available online at https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5e/Roman_pipe_organ_Aquincum.jpg.

Figure 3

Obelisk erected by Emperor Theodosius (379/88-395) in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, pedestal, east face, right lower corner. Available online at https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dd/Obelisk_of_Theodosius_-East_face.JPG?uselang=de.

Figure 4

Spanish horse/donkey. Available online at http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/71/Osiol_hiszpanski_wisnia6522.JPG.

Figure 7

Folterbank. Available online at http://www.duden.de/_media/_full/F/Folterbank-201020540211.jpg. © David Hughes Fotolia.com.

Figure 8

Rack in the Tower of London. Available online at https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d0/A_Torture_Rack.jpg?uselang=de.